

15 Dec 1961

IN A DESPERATE TIME, A FEARLESS RESCUE

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U.S. Senator Thomas J. Dodd of Connecticut is a member of the Foreign Relations Committee and an outspoken supporter of President Tshombe of Katanga (see Editorial, p. 4). In Katanga last month Dodd became involved in a sensational incident which he describes in this article.

by SENATOR THOMAS J. DODD

I have just returned from a visit to the former Belgian Congo. I wanted to inform myself at first hand about this complex situation and to find out whether some formula could be devised that would result in the nation's reunification.

In Elisabethville, the capital of Katanga Province, I was accorded a wonderfully warm welcome. Nevertheless, there was an underlying tension in the city. Everywhere there were armed men: on the one side the berets and blue helmets of the U.N. troops, on the other side, men in the uniform of the Katangese army, all mixing together in the streets. The Katangans had considered the U.N. Security Council resolution of Nov. 24 a declaration of imminent war. It was apparent that both sides had their fingers on their triggers.

Soon after our arrival, there occurred an incident which I feel was inaccurately reported and exaggerated by the press. This is what happened:

Mrs. Dodd and I were invited to an intimate dinner by Sheridan Smith, head of Mobiloil for Katanga. We set out in President Tshombe's own car, which he had made available for the duration of my stay, and with an escort of five motorcycle gendarmes. In the car with us were four other guests: the U.S. consul, Lewis Hoffacker and his wife, my assistant David Martin and the military escort, Lieut. Colonel Thomas Tarpley.

As we approached our destination, we saw a truck parked in the middle of the road with a cluster of soldiers around. My first thought was that there had been a traffic accident. But as we drew up beside the truck, I saw the figure of George Ivan Smith, a U.N. official whom I had met earlier, slumped on the floor of the truck, his shirt torn and blood pouring from his head. He raised his head and

cried: "Help me! For God's sake, get me out of here."

Another figure was slumped in the back of the truck, and in the glare of the headlights I saw a third man, Brian Urquhart, a British U.N. official, being pummeled by a group of soldiers swinging their rifle butts. "For God's sake, help me!" Urquhart

cried. "They're going to kill me!" At that point Hoffacker took one of the bravest actions I have ever seen. He leaped out of the car shouting that he was the American consul and that we were all the guests of President

Tshombe. Tshombe's chauffeur quietly tried to help him by translating his words into Swahili.

Hoffacker's boldness took the soldiers by surprise. He pushed his way to the back of the truck, and though the soldiers jostled him and raised their rifle stocks, they did not actually strike him.

Hoffacker dragged the only partly conscious Smith from the truck to the car and pushed him in. He then went back and rescued the second man, who turned out to be the president of the Bank of Congo in Katanga, a Mr. Willame.

Colonel Tarpley instructed us all not to move. And so we sat there, helplessly, for minutes that seemed like eons, watching in horrified silence as the struggle went on around us.

On the truck one soldier hit Urquhart a terrific blow with his rifle, and I was sure the U.N. official was dead. In front of the car the gendarmes of our escort, who were unarmed, attempted to reason with the soldiers. A Congolese civilian in a white shirt jumped between them, screaming and gesticulating and urging the soldiers on. An excited soldier clicked the bolt of his rifle, introducing a cartridge into the chamber. Within seconds half a dozen others had followed his example and had pointed their rifles at the car. Another soldier pulled out a knife.

It seemed obvious that all hell was about to break loose in a matter of seconds. Hoffacker had rescued two of the three men. Now he had to make an agonizing decision. If he went back to get Urquhart, he would be endangering all the occupants of the car, including two women. He did the only thing he could have done. "We must save Urquhart," he said, but it was clear we needed help. Hoffacker ordered the chauffeur to speed to the

floor. "Get down on the floor!" he said. "They may shoot." With four people in the front and five in the rear, this was easier said than done. But we pushed Mrs. Dodd and Mrs. Hoffacker down to the floor, brought our own heads as low as possible, and sped away.

We reached the presidential palace safely, and talked to Interior Minister Munongo and Foreign Affairs Minister Kimba, who promised to do all they could to find Urquhart and deliver him to the U.S. consulate. We hurried to the consulate to wait

A few minutes later the colonel in command of the Gurkha battalion burst through the front door in full battle dress, his mustache bristling.

"Where are those God-damned bastards?" he shouted. "I'll give them 45 minutes to return Urquhart. If

he's not back by then I'll storm the presidential palace. I don't care if I lose every man in my battalion."

We all realized that if the Gurkhas started shooting it might set off a massacre in which thousands of people—probably including Urquhart if he was still alive—would lose their lives. The colonel's behavior confirmed my worst fears about the lack of restraint and lack of response to civilian control of certain officers in the U.N. command. Finally, after much persuasion, the colonel simmered down and agreed to wait until 11:30 p.m. It was then almost 10:30.

As 11 o'clock rolled around, Hoffacker phoned the colonel's commanding officer and appealed to him to order a further delay. The order was delivered to the angry Gurkha by armored car at 11:20—just 10 minutes before his deadline.

Meanwhile Hoffacker was keeping in constant touch with the presidential palace by phone. Munongo kept saying that Urquhart was alive, but he was still unable to produce him. Outside the consulate, the Gurkha colonel was getting restless. At 11:30 p.m., Munongo told Hoffacker he had located Urquhart and would get him to the U.S. consulate in 10 minutes.

It was well after midnight when Urquhart finally was delivered.

Urquhart and the two men who had been saved earlier were all pretty badly banged up—they had such injuries as broken ribs and fingers, but none was seriously hurt.

All three had been seized in the same house we were headed for. Smith and Willame were dinner guests as we were. Urquhart had just stopped by for a minute. The Katangese soldiers and the white-shirted agitator had burst in, grabbed them and hustled them out of the house.

The whole incident was carried out by enemies of President Tshombe who knew I was a Tshombe supporter and who were attempting to embarrass both of us. The incident obviously was planned by someone who knew the time and place of the dinner and wanted certain guests but not others. Under the circumstances, their seizure of the two U.N. officials is understandable. But why the Belgian banker, Mr. Willame?

My wife and David Martin feel sure they mistook him for me. Perhaps so. In that case only the fact that we were late for dinner saved me from a bad beating—and possibly worse.

ANDS OF BULLETS festoon vehicle carrying Katangese soldier toward area where U.N. troops are dug in.

FACES OF FEAR appear on Elisabethville streets as families flee mortar shelling, lugging their belongings.